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GERMELSHAUSEN.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF GERSTÄCKER.)

IN the autumn of 184– a fine, hearty young fellow, with knapsack on shoulder and staff in hand, was plodding leisurely along the broad high-road which leads up from Marisfeld to Wichtelhausen.

The traveler was no wandering journeyman seeking work from place to place, that was clear at a glance, even if the neat little leathern portfolio strapped upon his knapsack had not unmistakably betrayed the artist. Then, too, the broad-brimmed black hat jauntily set on one side, the long, light, curly hair and full though soft and youthful beard, all bespoke his calling; to say nothing of the worn black velvet coat, unbuttoned in the warmth of the morning; and as he wore no waistcoat, there showed beneath a white shirt loosely held at the neck by a black silk handkerchief.

A mile or so out of Marisfeld he heard the bells there ringing for church, and stopped, leaning on his stick and listening to the full chimes, whose harmony came floating to him faint and weird.

Long after the ringing had ceased, he stood there, looking dreamily over toward the mountain slope. His thoughts were at home with his own people in the pleasant little village by the Taunus Hills, with his mother and sisters, and something very like a tear gleamed in his eye. But his light and merry heart found little room for sorrowful thoughts. He only took off his hat, waved it with a kindly smile in the direction of his home, and then, with a firmer grip of his stout stick, strode briskly along the road again.

The sun, meanwhile, shone hotly down on the broad, monotonous, dusty highway, and our traveler had for a good while been looking out right and left for an easier path. There was a road, to be sure, that branched off to the right, but as it promised no better, and threatened to take him too far out of his way, he kept straight on a while longer, until he reached a clear mountain brook spanned by the ruins of an old stone bridge. On the other side a grassy path led down into the vale, but careless and without fixed aim, as he was only going to the pretty valley of the Werra to gather studies, he sprang dry-shod over the great stones in the bed of the stream to the close-cropped meadow beyond, and then, delighted with the change, stepped out briskly over the springy turf and in the shadow of a dense alder coppice on his further way.

"Now I have the advantage," said he, smiling to himself, "of not having the faintest notion where I'm going. None of your stupid guide-posts, telling you leagues beforehand the name of the next place, and then always getting the distance wrong. However the people here measure their leagues puzzles me. It's oddly quiet here in the valley! To be sure, on Sunday the peasants have nothing to do out-of-doors, and after having to plod along the whole week through behind the plow or beside the cart, they care little for Sunday walking, and would rather get a sound nap at church in the morning, and stretch their legs under the ale-house table in the afternoon. Ale-house! h'm! a glass of beer wouldn't go ill just now in this heat, but, till I can get it, this clear water will have to do instead." And so, throwing off hat and knapsack, he clambered down to the stream and drank his fill.

After enjoying the pleasant coolness of the draught, he noticed a queer old gnarled willow, which he set to sketching with ready and skillful hand; and then, thoroughly rested and refreshed, picked up his knapsack and went on his way, careless whither it might lead.

He had gone on a league or so in such easy fashion, sketching in his portfolio, here a bit of rock, and there a queer alder bush or a gnarled oak bough, and was just making up his mind, as the sun rose higher and higher, to step out more briskly, so as, at least, to be in time for dinner at the next village, when, further down the valley, he saw a peasant girl sitting beside the brook. She was at the foot of an old stone pedestal, the former base, perhaps, of some sculptured saint, and gazing along the way he was coming.

Himself hidden by the bushes, he saw her sooner than she him; but following the course of the brook, he had no sooner stepped out from the screen than she sprang up with a cry of joy, and darted toward him.

Arnold, as the young painter was named, stopped short in surprise, and saw that the stranger was a beautiful girl of scarce seventeen, and dressed in a peculiar but extremely neat peasant costume, who was hurrying to him with outstretched arms. He knew, of course, that she took him for some one else, and that this joyous welcome was not intended for him. In fact, as soon as the young girl caught a clear sight of him, she stopped, frightened, turned first pale and then crimson, and, timid and embarrassed, stammered out,

"Pray excuse me, Sir; I—I thought—"

"That I was your sweetheart, didn't you, my dear?" said the young man, laughing; "and now you are vexed to meet another—a stranger, whom you don't care for. Don't be angry with me for not being the right man."

"Oh, how can you speak so?" said the girl, in a low, embarrassed voice. "How could I be angry? But if you only knew how I have longed to see him!"

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"Then he doesn't deserve you should wait for him a minute longer," said Arnold, struck with the really wonderful grace of the simple peasant girl. "If I had been in his place, you shouldn't have had to wait a single second in vain for me."

"How oddly you talk!" said the girl, abashed. "If he *could* have come, he would certainly have been here. Perhaps he is ill, or perhaps dead," she added, slowly, and with a long-drawn sigh.

"And is it so long since you have heard from him?"

"Very, very long."

"Then he lives far from here, I suppose?"

"Far? yes, a good bit from here," said the girl—"in Bischofsroda."

"Bischofsroda! why, I've just been staying there four weeks, and know every creature in the village. What's his name?"

"Heinrich—Heinrich Vollgut," answered the girl, timidly; "the son of the magistrate in Bischofsroda."

"H'm," said Arnold. "I've been in and out at the magistrate's often; his name is Bauerling—I'm sure of that; and I never heard the name of Vollgut in the whole village."

"You can't very well know all the people in the place," replied the girl; and through the sad expression that lay on her sweet face there stole a mischievous little smile that became her quite as well as her former melancholy, or perhaps better.

"But," said the young painter, "you can come over the mountains from Bischofsroda in two hours, or, at most, in three."

"And yet he is not here," answered the girl, again with a deep sigh, "though he promised me so faithfully."

"Then he will certainly come," Arnold exclaimed, assuringly and heartily; "for if any body has once promised you any thing, he must have a heart of stone to break his word, and Heinrich certainly has not that."

"No, indeed," said the girl, earnestly. "But now I won't wait for him any longer. I must be at home by noon, or my father will scold me."

"And where is your home?"

"Right there in the valley. Don't you hear the bell? They are just ringing for church to let out."

Arnold listened, and could hear, from time to time, the slow strokes of a bell. They sounded not full and deep, but harsh and discordant; and as he looked down upon the landscape, a dense yellow fog seemed to hang over the whole valley.

"Your bell is cracked," he said; "it rings false."

"Yes, I know it," the girl answered, calmly. "It doesn't ring nicely, and we would have had it recast, only there's never enough money; and besides, there's no bell-founder here. Yet what does it matter? We know it, and we know what it means when it strikes, so it does just as well as a sound one."

"What is the name of your village?"

"Germelshausen."

"And can I get from there to Wichtelhausen?"

"Very easily. It takes only an hour; perhaps not so long if you walk fast."

"Then I will go with you through your village, my child, and if you have a good ale-house, I'll eat my dinner there."

"The inn is only too good," said the girl, sighing, and casting a look back to see if even now her Heinrich were not coming.

"And can an inn ever be too good?"

"For peasants, yes," she said, seriously, as she walked by his side down into the valley. "In the evening, after the day's work, peasants still have many things to do about the house, and they neglect them if they sit late at the tavern."

"But I've nothing more to do to-day."

"Ah, of course, with gentlemen it's very different. They don't work, and so they have nothing to neglect; but peasants have to earn their bread for them."

"Well, not exactly," said Arnold; "they *grow* the bread, certainly, but we have to earn it ourselves, and hardly enough, too, sometimes. Besides, peasants' work is very fairly paid."

"But you don't do any work."

"Why not?"

"Your hands don't look so."

"I'll show you how I can work. Just sit down there on that flat stone under the old alder bush."

"But what shall I do there?"

"Only sit there," said the young artist, quickly throwing off his knapsack and taking up his portfolio and pencil.

"But I must go home."

"In five minutes I'll be through. I should like to carry out into the world with me some remembrance of you that even your Heinrich could not object to."

"A remembrance of me? You are jesting."

"I will take your portrait with me."

"You are a painter?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Then you could paint over the pictures in our church in Germelshausen; they are all spoiled."

"What is your name?" asked Arnold, who had meanwhile opened his portfolio and rapidly sketched the girl's lovely features.

"Gertrude."

"And what is your father?"

"The magistrate of the village. If you are a painter, you shall not go to the inn; but I'll take you to the house, and after dinner you can talk over every thing with my father."

"Talk over the church pictures?"

"Yes, certainly," the girl answered, seriously; "and you must stay with us a long,

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long time, until—until our day comes again, and the pictures will be all ready."

"We'll talk about that afterward, Gertrude," said the painter, busily handling his pencil meanwhile. "But won't your Heinrich be angry if I'm at your house very often, and talk with you a great deal?"

"Heinrich?" said the girl. "He won't come any more."

"Not to-day, but to-morrow, perhaps."

"No," said Gertrude, quietly. "At eleven o'clock he was not there, so he will stay away until we have our day again."

"Your day? What do you mean by that?"

The girl looked at him with great, serious eyes, but did not answer his question; and while her gaze followed the clouds drifting past high overhead, her face wore a peculiar expression of pain and sorrow.

At this moment Gertrude was really beautiful as an angel, and Arnold forgot every thing in the interest he took in finishing the portrait. He had but little more time; for the young girl stood up suddenly, and, throwing a handkerchief over her head to shield her from the sun, she said,

"I must go; the day is so short, and they expect me at home."

Arnold had his little picture ready, and drawing in the drapery of the dress with a couple of bold strokes, he said, holding it out toward her,

"Have I caught the likeness?"

"Is that I?" exclaimed Gertrude, quickly, and almost frightened.

"Who else should it be?" said Arnold, laughing.

"And do you wish to keep the picture and take it away with you?" she asked, shyly but anxiously.

"Certainly," said the young man; "and when I am far, far from here, I shall think of you very often."

"But will my father permit it?"

"Permit me to think of you? How can he prevent it?"

"No, but permit you to take the picture out into the world with you?"

"He can't hinder me, my dear," said Arnold. "But would it displease you to know it was in my hands?"

"Me? no," answered the girl, after a short deliberation. "But still I must ask my father."

"You're a queer child," said the painter, laughing. "Even a princess would be willing to let a painter have her portrait. Why, no harm can come of it. But don't run away, you wild little thing. I'm going with you. Or do you want to leave me here behind, with no dinner? Have you forgotten the church pictures?"

"Oh yes, the pictures," she said, standing still and waiting for him.

Arnold, who had fastened up his portfolio quickly, was at her side in a moment, and then, walking faster than before, they went on toward the village.

It lay, however, much nearer than Arnold had supposed from the sound of the cracked bell; for what he had from a distance taken for an alder thicket turned out, on coming nearer, to be a closely planted row of fruit trees, behind which, snugly sheltered, but on the north and northwest surrounded by broad fields, lay the old village, with its low church tower and its smoke-begrimed roofs.

At first they came upon a solid, well-paved road planted with fruit trees on each side. Over the village hung the dark fog, which Arnold had seen from a distance, and obscured the clear sunshine, which fell upon the gray old weather-beaten roofs with a dismal yellow light. However, Arnold had hardly a glance for all this, for Gertrude, who was walking at his side, quietly took his hand as they approached the first houses, and holding it in hers, she walked on with him into the next street.

A strange emotion took possession of the young fellow at the contact of this warm hand, and involuntarily he sought the young girl's eye. Gertrude, however, did not look up at him, but with her gaze fixed modestly on the ground, she led the guest toward her father's house.

Arnold's attention was at last turned to the villagers he met, who passed by quietly without greeting him. This astonished him at first, for in all the neighboring villages it would have been considered almost an offense not to offer a stranger at least a "Good-day" or a "Grüss Gott." Here no one thought of such a thing; and just as in a large city, the people went by either silent and indifferent, or stood still and looked after them, but none accosted them—even the girl herself was not greeted by a soul.

And how odd the old houses looked, with their pointed and carved gables and thatched roofs, all gray and weather-beaten! Although it was Sunday, not a window was brightly cleaned, but the round panes, set in lead, looked dull and tarnished, and caught on their flat surfaces a shimmering rainbow light. Here and there a casement opened as they went by, and the friendly faces of girls or staid old matrons looked out. Arnold was surprised at the queer costume of the people; it differed essentially from that of the neighboring villages. Then, too, an absolute, unbroken silence reigned every where, and became at last so painful that he said to his guide,

"Do you keep Sunday so strictly in your village that the people, when they meet, have not even a greeting for one another? If you didn't now and then hear a dog bark or a cock crow, you might think the whole place dead and buried."

"It is noon," Gertrude answered, placidly, "and the people don't feel like talking.

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This evening you will find them all the noisier."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Arnold, "there are at least some children playing in the street. It fairly began to seem uncanny here. Why, they keep Sunday very differently in Bischofsroda."

"There is my father's house," said Gertrude, softly.

"But I ought not to come down on him so unexpectedly; it might not be convenient; and I like to have friendly faces about me at table. You had better show me the inn, my child, or let me find it myself; for if Germelshausen is no exception to other villages, the inn stands close by the church, and if you aim for the tower, you can't go wrong."

"You are right there; at least, it is just so with us," said Gertrude, quietly. "But they expect us at home, and you need not fear you won't be welcome."

"Do they expect *us*? Ah! you mean yourself and your Heinrich. If you would take me in his place, I would stay here as long as—as—until you yourself should tell me to go away."

He spoke the words with involuntary ardor, and softly pressed her hand, which still held his own. Gertrude immediately stood perfectly still, and said, looking at him earnestly,

"Would you, really?"

"With all my heart," said the young painter, quite overcome by the girl's beauty.

Gertrude, however, replied no further, but walked on as if deliberating upon his words. At last she stopped before a high house with broad stone steps and iron railings in front, and said, in her former shy and embarrassed way,

"I live here, Sir, and if it please you, come with me to my father, who will be proud to see you at his table."

Before Arnold could answer, the magistrate himself stood in the doorway, and a window was opened, from which the friendly head of an old woman looked out and nodded, while the father said,

"Why, Gertrude, you've staid out long to-day; and what a fine companion you've brought with you!"

"My dear Sir—" Arnold began.

"Don't stand talking on the steps. Come in. The dumplings are done, and they'll soon be cold and hard."

"But that isn't Heinrich," the old woman called out of the window. "Didn't I always say he wouldn't come back?"

"There, there, that 'll do, mother," said the magistrate, as he stepped forward and held out his hand to the stranger. "Welcome to Germelshausen, young gentleman, wherever the girl may have picked you up! And now come in to dinner, and fall to with a relish, and afterward we can talk."

The young painter had really no more chance for apology, for, vigorously shaking the hand which Gertrude had dropped, as soon as he set foot upon the steps, the magistrate took him confidentially under the arm and led him toward the family living-room.

The air in the house was damp and earthy. Well as Arnold knew the German peasant's habit of shutting out every breath of fresh air, and even in summer often making a fire to get up the roasting heat in which he is most at home, still the atmosphere seemed strange to him. The narrow entry offered little that was inviting. The plaster had fallen from the walls, and seemed to have been just hastily swept aside. The one window, at the back, admitted scarcely a ray of light, and the stairs that led to the upper story looked old and dilapidated.

He had, however, little time to observe all this, for in a moment his hospitable host threw open the door of the living-room. It was not a high room, but very spacious, and freshly aired, strewn with white sand; the table, in the centre, spread with snowy linen, contrasted most agreeably with the remaining somewhat disorderly arrangement of the house.

Besides the old woman, who had now shut the window and drawn her chair to the table, there sat in the corner a couple of rosy-cheeked children. There was also a stout peasant woman (clad, like the others, in a costume different from that of the neighboring villages), and she was just opening the door for the maid-servant, who came in with a large dish. The dumplings were smoking on the table, and they all pushed up their chairs for the welcome meal. No one, however, sat down, and the children kept casting anxious glances toward the father, who went to his chair, leaned upon it with his arm, and looked gloomily and in perfect silence upon the ground before him. Was he praying? Arnold saw that he held his lips pressed together, and his right hand, firmly clinched, hung at his side. In his features there was certainly no sign of prayer, but rather of stubborn and yet helpless defiance.

At last Gertrude went softly up to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder, while the old woman stood opposite with earnest and beseeching looks.

"Let us eat," said the man, sharply; "it's of no use;" and moving his chair forward, and nodding to his guest, he seated himself, took up the great ladle, and helped them all round.

His whole manner impressed Arnold unpleasantly, and what with the constrained behavior of the others, too, he could hardly feel comfortable. However, the magistrate was not a man to spoil a dinner with gloomy thoughts. When he knocked on the table

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the maid-servant came in with bottles and glasses, and with the costly old wine which he poured out came a lighter and happier spirit over all the table.

The rare drink went through Arnold's veins like liquid fire; never in his life had he tasted any thing like it. Gertrude drank it, and so did the old mother, who sat in the corner by her spinning-wheel, singing, in a low voice, a little song about the happy life in Germelshausen. Even the magistrate seemed to undergo a change. In proportion as he was before silent and morose, he was now gay and merry; and Arnold himself could not escape the influence of this rare wine. He hardly knew how it happened, but the magistrate had taken a violin and was playing a lively dance, while Arnold, with the lovely Gertrude in his arms, whirled about the room so madly that he upset the spinning-wheel and chairs, and ran against the maid, who was clearing off the table, and played all sorts of lively tricks, until the others almost killed themselves with laughing.

Suddenly every thing in the room was hushed; and as Arnold looked around in surprise for the magistrate, he pointed with his violin bow to the window, and laid the instrument back in its wooden case. Then Arnold saw that in the street outside a coffin was being carried by. Six men, clad in white gowns, bore it on their shoulders, and behind them walked an old man with a little fair-haired girl by the hand. The old man was bent nearly double, but the child, who was scarcely four years old, and could have no notion what lay in the dark coffin, nodded cheerfully whenever she spied a familiar face, and laughed aloud as two dogs scampered by chasing each other, and one of them ran against the steps of the school-house and tumbled himself over.

The silence lasted only as long as the coffin remained in sight, and then Gertrude stepped up to the young man and said,

"Now rest a while. You have frolicked long enough, and the strong wine is going more and more to your head. Come, get your hat and we'll take a little walk together. When we come back it will be time to go to the tavern; there is a dance to-night."

"Dance? Good!" exclaimed Arnold, delighted. "I came just at the right time. And you'll give me the first dance, Gertrude?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

Arnold took up his hat and portfolio, and the magistrate asked,

"What do you want of the book?"

"He can draw, father," said Gertrude; "he has drawn me. Just look at the picture."

Arnold opened the portfolio and held out the little portrait.

The peasant considered it a while in silence.

"You want to take that away with you," he said at length, "and perhaps frame it and hang it up?"

"Yes; why not?"

"May he, father?" said Gertrude.

"If he doesn't stay with us, I have nothing to say against it; but there's something lacking at the back there."

"What?"

"The funeral procession. Paint that in on the same paper, and you may take the picture away with you."

"The funeral procession with Gertrude?"

"There's room enough," said the magistrate, stubbornly. "It must be put there, for I won't let you take my child's picture away all alone. In such serious company, nobody can think any harm of her."

Arnold shook his head and laughed over the strange notion of giving the lovely girl a funeral procession as guard of honor. However, the old man seemed to have his idea fixed, and, to content him, he let him have his way. Afterward, Arnold knew, he could easily take out such a gloomy accompaniment. He sketched, from memory, the shapes that had just passed by, while the whole family pressed about him and watched, with wide-open eyes, the rapid execution of the drawing.

"There, is that all right?" he asked, holding the picture at arms-length.

"Capital!" answered the magistrate, with a nod. "Who'd have thought you could do it so quick? And now go with the girl and see the village. You may not get a sight at it again. But make sure to be back again by five o'clock. To-day is a festival, and you ought to be on hand."

What with the closeness of the room and the wine in his head, Arnold felt heavy and oppressed, and longed for the fresh air; so in a few moments he was walking by the lovely Gertrude's side along the street that led through the village.

Now the road was not so still as before. Children were playing in the street, and old men sat before the doors here and there and watched them; and the whole place, with its curious old buildings, would have had a pleasant aspect if the sun could only have shone through the thick brownish smoke that lay over the roofs like a cloud.

"Is there a bog or wood burning in the neighborhood?" Arnold asked. "This smoke hangs over no other village, and it can't come from the chimneys."

"It's from the earth," said Gertrude, calmly. "But did you never hear of Germelshausen?"

"Never."

"That's strange; and the place is so old —so very old."

"The houses certainly look so, and the

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people have an odd sort of demeanor; besides, your speech is different from that of the neighboring places. You seldom get out of your village, I suppose?"

"Seldom," said Gertrude.

"Why, there isn't a single swallow. They can't have gone away already?"

"Long ago," answered the girl, speaking in a low monotone. "They don't build their nests in Germelshausen any more. Perhaps they can't bear the air here."

"But you don't always have this fog?"

"Always."

"That's the reason, then, that your fruit trees don't bear. Why, in Marisfeld they have to prop up the branches, there's such a plenty this year."

Gertrude answered no further, but walked at his side silently through the village, until they reached the outer limits. On the way she often nodded pleasantly to some child, or spoke a few low words to some young girl, perhaps about the dance or the ball dress.

The girls cast very kindly glances upon the young painter, and he himself felt, he scarcely knew why, a certain warmth about the heart; but he did not dare say so to Gertrude.

Finally they reached the very last houses, where it was lonely and silent as death, although the village was full of life. The gardens looked as if they had not been trodden for years; long grass grew in the paths; and it seemed particularly strange that the fruit trees should every one be barren.

Now they met people coming toward them, and Arnold immediately recognized the returning funeral train. It moved silently past them again into the village, and involuntarily they turned their steps toward the burying-ground.

Arnold tried to cheer up his companion, who seemed very sad. He spoke to her of other places where he had been, and described how the outside world looked. She had never seen a railroad, nor even heard of one, and listened to Arnold's description attentive and astonished. Neither had she any notion of the telegraph, nor of any of the new inventions; and the young painter could not understand how it was possible that there could be living in Germany people so completely cut off from the rest of the world.

Talking in this way, they reached the grave-yard, and the young painter was struck with the antique stones and monuments, although they were all perfectly plain and simple.

"That is a very old stone," he said, bending over the nearest one, and with difficulty deciphering the twisted letters.

ANNA MARIA BERTHOLD, born STIEGLITZ.
Born December 1, 1188;
died December 2, 1224.

"That is my mother," said Gertrude, seriously, and two great shining tears welled up to her eyes and rolled down slowly upon her dress.

"Your mother! my good child," exclaimed Arnold, astonished—"one of your great-great-grandmothers, it might have been."

"No," said Gertrude, "my own mother. My father married again, and the one at home is my step-mother."

"But doesn't it say died 1224?"

"The year is nothing to me," said Gertrude, sadly. "It is hard to be separated from one's mother; and yet," she added, softly and sorrowfully, "it was well perhaps that she went to God before it happened."

Arnold shook his head, and bent over the stone to examine the inscription more closely, and see if the first 2 in the date might not be an 8, which the antique lettering made not unlikely. But no; the other 2 was exactly like the first, and we haven't yet reached 1884. Perhaps the stone-cutter had made a mistake. The girl was so absorbed in thinking of her dead mother that he would not disturb her with questions; so he left her at the stone, where she had sunk down, softly praying, and went on to examine some of the other monuments. All, without exception, bore date many hundred years back—even as far as 930 and 900 A.D. He found no newer stones, and yet burials were even now made there, as the last entirely fresh grave testified.

From the low church wall was an excellent view of the old village, and Arnold immediately seized the opportunity to make a sketch. Over this place, also, hung the strange fog or smoke, and yet farther toward the wood he could see the sun shining clear and bright upon the mountain slope.

Again the old cracked bell rang in the village, and Gertrude, standing up quickly and brushing the tears from her eyes, beckoned pleasantly to the young man to follow her.

Arnold was at her side in an instant.

"We must not grieve any longer," she said, smiling; "they are ringing church out, and now comes the dance. You must have thought the people of Germelshausen very dull and stupid, but this evening you shall find just the contrary."

"Yes; but over there is the church door," Arnold said, "and I see nobody coming out."

"That's very likely," answered the girl, laughing, "because nobody goes in, not even the priest; but the old sacristan gives himself no rest, and rings church out and in."

"And none of you go to church?"

"No; neither to mass nor confession," she replied, calmly. "We are at variance with the Pope, who lives in a far country, and he will not allow it until we obey him again."

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"But I have never in my life heard any thing about it."

"Indeed! well, it happened so very long ago," said the girl, carelessly. "Look, there's the sacristan coming out of the church, all alone, and shutting the door. He doesn't go to the tavern in the evening, but sits at home all by himself."

"And does the priest go?"

"I should think so! He's the merriest of all; he doesn't take it to heart."

"And how did all this happen?" asked Arnold, less surprised at the curious statements than at the girl's artlessness.

"It's a long story," replied Gertrude, "and the priest has written it all down in a great thick book. If it would amuse you, and if you know Latin, you can read the book. But," she added, warningly, "don't speak of it before my father, because it vexes him. See, here are the young men and girls coming out of the houses already, and I must hurry to get home and dress myself, for I wouldn't like to be the last."

"And how about the first dance, Gertrude?"

"I shall dance it with you; you have my promise."

They walked quickly back to the village, where quite a different spirit was prevailing since the morning. Laughing groups of young people stood every where around; the girls were decked out for the holiday, and the boys, too, wore their best clothes. Outside the tavern, as they went by, were garlands of leaves hung from window to window, and forming a great triumphal arch over the door.

When Arnold saw that every one was in his best attire, he did not care to appear in his traveling clothes, so he went in at the magistrate's, unbuckled his knapsack, took out his good suit, and just had his toilet done when Gertrude knocked at the door and called him. How wonderfully beautiful the girl looked in her rich yet simple costume, and how sweetly she bade him come with her, as the father and mother would not come till later.

"The longing after her Heinrich can not oppress her heart very much," thought the young man, with satisfaction, as he drew her arm through his and walked with her in the gathering twilight to the dancing hall. He took good care, however, not to give words to such a thought. It was a singular feeling that came stealing over him; and when the young girl's heart beat against his arm, his own throbbed violently.

"And to-morrow I must go on again," he said, softly, with a sigh. He hardly knew that he had spoken, when his companion answered, smiling,

"Don't concern yourself about that: we will be together longer — longer perhaps than you would wish."

"And would you like me to stay with you, Gertrude?" asked Arnold, his forehead flushing.

"Certainly," she replied, artlessly. "You are good and pleasant, and I know my father likes you, too. Besides, Heinrich didn't come," she added, resentfully.

"And what if he come to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" said Gertrude, and looked up at him earnestly with her great dark eyes; "a long, long night lies between. To-morrow! You will understand to-morrow what the word means. But to-day let us not talk about it," she said, breaking off abruptly. "To-day is the festival we have long, oh! so long looked forward to, and we won't spoil it with sad thoughts. Here we are, you see, at the place. The young men won't take it amiss that I bring a new partner with me."

Arnold was going to speak further, but loud music from within drowned his voice. The musicians played strange tunes; he was not familiar with one of them; and at first he was almost blinded by the brightness of the many lights. However, Gertrude led him into the middle of the hall, where a crowd of young peasant girls were talking together. There she left him, until the dance should really begin, to look about a little and become acquainted with the other young men.

For the first few moments Arnold felt ill at ease among such strange people. Their queer dress and accent repulsed him, and sweet as their peculiar speech had sounded from Gertrude's lips, it came very harshly from the others. Yet the young men were all friendly to him, and one of them came up, and taking his hand, said,

"It is sensible of you, Sir, to wish to remain with us. We lead a merry life, and the interval passes pretty quickly."

"What interval?" asked Arnold, less astonished at the expression than that the young man should speak so decidedly as if he were going to make the village his home. "You think that I am coming back here?"

"Why, do you intend to go away?" asked the peasant, quickly.

"Yes, to-morrow, or the day after; but I'm coming back."

"To-morrow! Indeed! Oh, that's all right, then. To-morrow we'll talk it all over again. But come and let me show you all the fun, for if you go away to-morrow, you won't get another chance at it."

The others laughed slyly among themselves, but the young peasant took Arnold by the hand and led him all through the house, which was closely packed with swarms of people. First, they passed through rooms in which were card-players, who had great heaps of gold lying before them; then to a nine-pin alley all laid out in shining stones. In a third room "kiss-in-the-ring" and oth-

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er games were going on, and the young girls ran out and in, laughing and frolicking with the young fellows, until a flourish from the musicians, who had all along been playing merrily, gave the signal for the dance to begin, and Gertrude stood at Arnold's side and took his arm.

"Come, we must not be the last," said the charming girl, "for, as the magistrate's daughter, I have to open the dance."

"But what strange tune is that?" said Arnold. "I can't get into the measure at all."

"You'll be all right presently," laughed Gertrude. "In five minutes you'll get used to it. I'll show you how."

They all pressed toward the dancing hall, laughing and making merry noisily, and Arnold soon forgot every thing in the mere happiness of holding the wonderfully lovely maiden in his arms.

Again and again he danced with Gertrude, and no one seemed to dispute his claim, though the young girls passing by them in the dance rallied him more than once on his devotion. One thing, however, surprised and troubled him. Close by the tavern stood the old church, and in the dancing-room the harsh, discordant tones of the cracked bell could be heard distinctly. At the first stroke it was as if some magic spell had fallen upon the dancers. The music ceased in the midst of a measure, the gayly moving crowd stood motionless, fixed as statues, and seemed to count anxiously, but all hushed as death, each heavy clang of the bell. But no sooner had the last echo died away than the noise and merriment broke out afresh. This was repeated at eight, at nine, and at ten o'clock. When Arnold tried to ask the meaning of such a strange proceeding, Gertrude laid her finger on her lips, and looked at him so sadly and so sorrowfully that for all the world he would not have troubled her any more.

At ten o'clock came a pause in the dance, and the musicians, who must have had lungs of iron, marched ahead of the young people into the supper-room. There every thing went merrily; the wine flowed freely; and Arnold, who could not very well be behind the rest, was realizing what a void the evening's dissipation would leave in his slender purse. But Gertrude sat close by him. They drank from the same glass; and could he long find room for any such anxiety? Besides, what if her Heinrich should come to-morrow?

The first stroke of eleven sounded, and again the boisterous jollity of the drinkers was hushed; again the breathless listening to each long, heavy tone. A strange dread fell upon him—he hardly knew of what—and a thought of his mother at home stole into his heart. He took up his glass slowly, and emptied it to the health of the loved ones far away.

At the eleventh stroke the guests sprang up from the table for the dance to begin anew, and all hurried back to the hall.

"To whom did you drink that last time?" said Gertrude, as she laid her hand upon his arm again.

Arnold hesitated. Perhaps Gertrude would laugh at him if he told her. But no; she had prayed fervently at her own mother's grave, and in a low voice he answered,

"To my mother."

Gertrude said not a word, and went up the stairs with him in silence. But she laughed no more, and before beginning the next dance, she asked,

"Do you love your mother so dearly?"

"More than my life."

"And does she love you?"

"Does not a mother always love her child?"

"And what would she do if you did not come home to her?"

"Poor mother," said Arnold, "her heart would break."

"The dance is beginning again," exclaimed Gertrude, quickly. "Come, we must not lose a moment."

And, wilder than ever, the dance went on. The young men, warmed with the strong wine, frolicked and shouted and fairly screamed, until the noise threatened to drown the music. Arnold no longer felt happy in the confusion, and Gertrude too had become silent and serious. But with the others the fun only seemed to increase, and in a pause of the dance the magistrate came up, gave the young fellow a hearty slap on the back, and said, laughing,

"That's right, Herr Painter; let your legs move lively this evening. We've time enough to rest. Nay, nay, little girl; what are you pulling such a long face about? Is that fit for the dance, do you think? Come; move lively. It's beginning again. I must go and hunt up my old woman and have the last turn with her. Get into place. Come; the musicians are puffing out their cheeks again." And, with a shout, he went off, elbowing through the noisy crowd.

Arnold had thrown his arm around Gertrude for the dance just beginning, when she suddenly freed herself, grasped his arm, and whispered, softly,

"Come!"

Arnold had no time to ask where, she urged him so hurriedly and secretly to the door of the hall.

"Where are you going?" two of her friends called out.

"Oh, I'm coming right back," she answered, shortly; and in a few seconds she and Arnold stood outside in the cool evening air.

"Where are you going, Gertrude?"

"Come!" Again she grasped his arm, and led him through the village to her father's

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house, where she stepped in, returning with a bundle.

"What are you going to do?" Arnold asked, astonished.

"Come!" was all she answered, and walked with him past all the houses, until they had left the outer walls of the village behind. They had been following the broad, hard, traveled street, but now Gertrude turned off to the left, and went up a little hill, from which one could easily look down on the brightly lighted windows of the tavern. Here she stood still, held out her hand to Arnold, and said, with feeling,

"Greet your mother for me, and farewell."

"Gertrude!" cried Arnold, astonished and perplexed, "will you send me from you so, and in the night? Have I said a word to offend you?"

"No, Arnold," said the girl, calling him for the first time by his name; "but just because—because I love you, you must go."

"But I will not leave you, still less in this way, to go back to the village all alone in the dark. You do not know how dear you are to me, how in these few hours I have given you all my heart. You do not know how—"

"Hush! Say no more," said Gertrude, interrupting him. "We will take no farewell. When you have heard the clock strike twelve—it can lack hardly ten minutes now—come back to the door of the tavern. I will wait for you there."

"And meanwhile?"

"Stay here on this spot. Promise me that you will not move a step to the right nor left until it shall have done striking twelve."

"I promise it, Gertrude; but then—"

"Then come," said the girl, and giving him her hand, was about to go.

"Gertrude!" cried Arnold, in a sorrowful, beseeching voice.

Gertrude hesitated a moment, then suddenly threw her arms about his neck, and Arnold felt her ice-cold lips pressed upon his own. It was only for an instant; in the next she had torn herself away, and he stood dazed and completely overcome, yet, remembering his promise, he remained on the spot where she had left him.

Now for the first time he noticed that within a few hours the weather had changed. The wind howled through the trees, the sky was covered with thick drifting clouds, and a few big drops of rain gave token of a coming storm.

The lights of the tavern shone brightly through the darkness, and as the wind blew from that way the sound of the instruments was borne to him in fitful gusts. But this did not last long. He had been standing so only a few minutes when the old church bell began to strike twelve, and at that instant the music stopped, or was drowned by the howling of the storm, which raged so fiercely over the whole hill-side that Arnold had to bend down to avoid being thrown upon the ground.

In stooping, he felt upon the earth before him the bundle that Gertrude had brought out of the house. It was his knapsack and portfolio, and in his surprise he stood up again. The hour had struck, the storm was blowing over, but nowhere in the village could he any longer see a light. The dogs that just before had been barking and howling were still, and a thick damp vapor exhaled from the ground.

"The time is up," Arnold murmured softly to himself, throwing his knapsack over his shoulder, "and I must see Gertrude once more, for I can not part from her so. The dance is over; the dancers will be going home now, and if the magistrate won't keep me overnight, I'll stay at the tavern; besides, I could never find my way through the wood in the dark."

He came cautiously down from the little slope that he had ascended with Gertrude, expecting to strike the broad white road that led into the village, but he only groped about vainly among the bushes. The ground was soft and marshy. With his thin boots he sank ankle-deep, and all about where he supposed the road to lie grew thick alder bushes. He could not have gone over the road in the darkness, for he would have felt it hard to the tread; besides, the village wall ran across it, and he could not have missed that. He sought about in anxious haste, but all in vain. The earth kept growing softer and more swampy. The further he went on, the thicker the bushes grew, and he was pierced on every side by thorns, his clothes torn to pieces, and his hands scratched until they bled.

Had he strayed off to the right or left, and so passed by the village? He feared wandering still further out of the way, and so remained upon a tolerably dry spot, waiting until the old bell should strike one. But it did not strike; not a dog barked, and no sound of human life reached him. In pain and anxiety, wet through and through, and shivering with cold, he worked his way back to the higher ground where Gertrude had left him. From there he made two more attempts to penetrate the thicket, but quite uselessly. Tired to death, and oppressed, too, by a vague terror, he shunned at last the dark, weird valley, and sought a sheltering tree under which to pass the night.

And how tediously the hours dragged by! Shivering with cold, he could not catch a moment's sleep all night long. From time to time he thought he could catch the harsh tones of the bell, but only to be, as so often before, disappointed.

At last the first faint light glimmered in the east, the clouds had passed away, the heavens were clear and star-lit, and the

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awakening birds twittered softly in the dusky trees.

The light in the east grew broader and brighter, and he could easily distinguish the tree-tops, but he looked in vain for the old church tower and the weather-beaten roofs. Nothing but a wild alder thicket, with here and there a stunted willow, lay before him.

At last he came to the stone on which he had sketched Gertrude. That place he would have recognized among a thousand, the old alder bush, with its stiff branches, marked it so plainly. He knew now exactly how he had come and where Germelshausen must lie; so keeping on strictly in the same direction, he walked back very briskly through the valley which he had followed yesterday with Gertrude. He recognized the slope over which the mountain mist had hung, and only the alder thicket separated him from the first houses. Now he had reached it, forced his way through, and—found himself back in the same swamp where he had been wading about in the night.

Tired to death, he threw himself down under a tree. He took from out his portfolio Gertrude's picture, and with bitter longing dwelt upon the dear face of the maiden that had taken such fast hold upon his heart.

Suddenly he heard behind him a rustling in the foliage, then a dog barked, and as he sprang up quickly, there stood, not far off, an old gamekeeper, who was looking curiously at such a strange, wild-looking individual so respectably dressed.

"Thank God!" cried Arnold, rejoiced to meet a human being, and then laying the leaf back in his portfolio, he said, "You're just the man I wanted to see, Herr Keeper, for I believe I'm astray."

"H'm," said the old man; "if you've passed the night lying in the bushes, when it's hardly a mile over to Dillstedt, where there's a good inn, I think so too. Donnerwetter! how you look—just as if you'd been tumbling head over heels in the briers and the marsh!"

"What is the next village called?"

"Dillstedt—right over there. When you get up on that rising ground you can see it lying just below."

"And how far is it to Germelshausen?"

"To *where?*" said the keeper, aghast, and taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"To Germelshausen."

"Lord 'a mercy on me!" cried the old man, casting a frightened glance around. "I know these woods well, but how many fathoms deep in the earth the 'enchanted village' lies, only God knows—and, besides, it's none of our business."

"The enchanted village!" exclaimed Arnold.

"Germelshausen—yes," said the keeper. "It stood right there in the swamp, where now the old willows and alders grow, but it sank—nobody knows why, or where it went, and there's a saying that every hundred years it comes up again. May no good Christian ever happen to see it! But lying out all night in the bushes doesn't seem to have agreed with you. You're white as a sheet. Here, take a drink from this flask—it will do you good—so—so—take plenty."

"Thanks."

"That isn't half enough—a good stiff pull. That's the right stuff. And now just you start for the tavern over there, and get into a warm bed."

"At Dillstedt?"

"Yes; of course, there isn't one nearer."

"But Germelshausen."

"Do me the favor not to speak of that place again right on the spot where we stand. Let the dead rest, and particularly those who haven't any rest, and may appear among us again unexpectedly at any moment."

"But yesterday the village was still standing here," Arnold insisted, utterly bewildered. "I was in it. I ate, drank, and danced there."

The keeper looked the young man over from head to foot, and then he said, smiling, "Are you sure it hadn't some other name? You *seem* to have come right from Dillstedt: there was a dance *there* last night, and it isn't every one that can bear the strong beer the landlord brews nowadays."

For answer, Arnold opened his portfolio, and took out the sketch he had made from the grave-yard.

"Do you know that village?"

"No," said the keeper, "in all the country round here there's no such low tower as that."

"That is Germelshausen," said Arnold. "And do the peasant girls in the neighborhood dress like this one here?"

"H'm, no. What kind of a queer funeral procession is that?"

Arnold did not answer. With a strange pang at his heart he laid the paper back in his portfolio.

"You can't miss the way to Dillstedt," said the keeper, good-naturedly, for a dim suspicion still haunted him that the stranger was not quite right in his head. "If you like, I'll guide you until you come in sight of the place; it wouldn't be far out of my way."

"Thank you," said Arnold, declining the offer. "I'll get over there all right. Then it's only once in a hundred years that the village comes up?"

"So the people say," answered the keeper; "but who can tell if it's true?"

Arnold had taken up his knapsack.

"Grüss Gott," he said, holding out his hand to the keeper.

"Thank you kindly," the man answered. "Where are you going now?"

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"To Dillstedt."

"That's right. The other side of the hill there you'll strike the high-road."

Arnold turned and walked slowly away, but when he reached the point from where he could see the whole valley, he stood still and looked back.

"Farewell, Gertrude," he murmured softly, and as he passed on his way there were tears in his eyes.

THE LAUREL BUSH:

An Old-fashioned Love Story.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN."

PART IV.

THE fly was already at the door, and Miss Williams, with her small luggage, would in five minutes have departed, followed by the good wishes of all the household, from Miss Maclachlan's school to her new situation, when the postman passed and left a letter for her.

"I will put it in my pocket and read it in the train," she said, with a slight change of color. For she recognized the handwriting of that good man who had loved her, and whom she could not love.

"Better read it now. No time like the present," observed Miss Maclachlan.

Miss Williams did so. As soon as she was fairly started and alone in the fly, she opened it, with hands slightly trembling, for she was touched by the persistence of the good rector, and his faithfulness to her, a poor governess, when he might have married, as they said in his neighborhood, "any body." He would never marry any body now—he was dying.

"I have come to feel how wrong I was," he wrote, "in ever trying to change our happy relations together. I have suffered for this—so have we all. But it is now too late for regret. My time has come. Do not grieve yourself by imagining it has come the faster through any decision of yours, but by slow, inevitable disease, which the doctors have only lately discovered. Nothing could have saved me. Be satisfied that there is no cause for you to give yourself one moment's pain." (How she sobbed over those shaky lines, more even than over the newspaper lines which she had read that sunshiny morning on the shore!) "Remember only that you made me very happy—me and all mine—for years; that I loved you, as even at my age a man can love; as I shall love you to the end, which can not be very far off now. Would you dislike coming to see me just once again? My girls will be so very glad, and nobody will remark it, for nobody knows any thing. Besides, what matter? I am dying. Come, if you can, within a week or so; they tell me I may last thus long. And I want to consult with you about my children. Therefore I will not say good-by now, only good-night, and God bless you."

But it was good-by, after all. Though she did not wait the week; indeed, she waited for nothing, considered nothing, except her gratitude to this good man—the only man who had loved her—and her affection for the two girls, who would soon be fatherless; though she sent a telegram from Brighton to say she was coming, and arrived within twenty-four hours, still—she came too late.

When she reached the village she heard that his sufferings were all over; and a few yards from his garden wall, in the shade of the church-yard lime-tree, the old sexton was busy re-opening, after fourteen years, the family grave, where he was to be laid beside his wife the day after to-morrow. His two daughters, sitting alone together in the melancholy house, heard Miss Williams enter, and ran to meet her. With a feeling of nearness and tenderness such as she had scarcely ever felt for any human being, she clasped them close, and let them weep their hearts out in her motherly arms.

Thus the current of her whole life was changed; for when Mr. Moseley's will was opened, it was found that, besides leaving Miss Williams a handsome legacy, carefully explained as being given "in gratitude for her care of his children," he had chosen her as their guardian, until they came of age or married, entreating her to reside with them, and desiring them to pay her all the respect due to "a near and dear relative." The tenderness with which he had arranged every thing, down to the minutest points, for them and herself, even amidst all his bodily sufferings, and in face of the supreme hour—which he had met, his daughters said, with a marvelous calmness, even joy—touched Fortune as perhaps nothing had ever touched her in all her life before. When she stood with her two poor orphans beside their father's grave, and returned with them to the desolate house, vowing within herself to be to them, all but in name, the mother he had wished her to be, this sense of duty—the strange new duty which had suddenly come to fill her empty life—was so strong, that

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